How Tafsir is Performed ?

﴿ كيفية التفسير ﴾

[English – إنجليزي]

Sheikh-ul-Islam ibn Taymiyyah

أحمد بن عبد الحليم بن تيمية

2011 - 1432

IslamHouse.com

If you ask what is the best method of tafsîr, the answer is that the best way is to explain the Qur'ân through the Qur'ân. For, what the Qur'ân alludes to at one place is explained at the other, and what it says in brief on one occasion is elaborated upon at the other. But if this does not help you, you should turn to the Sunnah, because the Sunnah explains and elucidates the Qur'ân. Imâm Abû 'Abdullâh Muhammad Ibn Idrîs ash-Shâfi'î has said: "All that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said is what he has derived from the Qur'ân." Allâh has said:

We have sent down to you the book in truth that you may judge between me, as Allâh guides you; so do not be an advocate for those who betray their trust. [al-Qur'ân 4:105]

We have sent down to you the message that you may explain clearly to people what has been sent to them, and that they think over it. [al-Qur'ân 16:44]

We sent down the Book to you for the express purpose that you should make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe. [al-Qur'ân 16:64]

This is why the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam said:

Know that I have been given the Qur'ân and something like it. [Ahmad, Musnad, Vol. IV 131; Abû Dâwûd, Sunan, Sunnah, 5]

Namely the Sunnah. In fact, the Sunnah, too has been given to him through wahy as the Qur'ân, except that it has not been recited to him as the Qur'ân. Imâm ash-Shâfi'î and other scholars have advanced a number of arguments in support of this point; but this is not the place to quote them. [For discussion see ash-Shâfi`î, ar-Risâlah]

In order to understand the Qur'ân, you should first look to the Qur'ân itself. If that does not help, then turn to the Sunnah.

The Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam sent Mu'âdh radiallâhu 'anhu to Yemen and asked him: "How will you judge the cases (that come to you)?" He replied: "I will judge according to the Book of Allâh." "But if you do not get anything there, what will you do?", the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam asked. He said: "I will refer to the Sunnah of the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam." "But if you do not get it even there, what will you do?", the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam asked again. He replied: "I will exercise my judgment." Hearing this the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam patted Mu'âdh radiallâhu 'anhu on the shoulder and said: "Praise be to Allâh who has guided the Messenger of His Messenger to what pleases His Messenger."

This hadîth has been reported in the Musnad and Sunan collections of hadîth with a good isnâd. [Ahmad, Musnad V:230, 236, 242; ad-Dârimî, Sunan, Muqaddimah, 30; at-Tirmidhî, Sunan, Ahkâm, 3; Abû Dâwûd, Sunan, Adhiyah, 11.]

When you do not get any help from the Qur'ân or the Sunnah, turn to the words of the companions. For they know the Qur'ân better: they have witnessed its revelation, and passed through the situations in which it was revealed: and know it and understand it fully. This is particularly true of the scholars and leaders such as the four righteous caliphs and 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ûd. Imâm Abû Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarîr at-Tabarî reports: Abû Kurayb narrated to us, saying: Jâbir ibn Nûh informed us that: al-A'mash informed us from Abû Duhâ: from Masrûq that 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ûd said: "By the one besides whom there none having the right to be worshipped, there is no verse in the Qur'ân about which I do not know in whose case and at what place was it revealed. If I were aware that anyone knew the Qur'ân more than me, and I could reach him, I would certainly have gone to see him." [Ibn al-Athîr, Jâmi' al-Usûl fî Ahâdîth ar-Rasûl, 1392/1972, Vol. IX p. 48.] Al-A'mash has also reported through Abû Wâ`il that Ibn Mas'ûd said: "When anyone of us learned ten verses of the Qur'ân, he did not proceed further unless he had known what they meant and what action they demanded."

Another great scholar is 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs radiallâhu 'anhumâ, the nephew of the Prophet sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam and the commentator of the Qur'ân. He attained that stature in virtue of the Prophet's prayer: "O Allâh! Give him knowledge of Islâm and teach him the meaning of the Qur'ân." [Ahmad, Musnad, Vol. 1: 266, 314, 328, 335]. Muhammad ibn Bashshâr narrated to us, that Wakî` informed us, that Sufyân informed us from al-A'mash: from Musim (ibn Sabîh Abî Duhâ) from Masrûq: that 'Abdullâh ibn Mas'ûd radiallâhu 'anhumâ said: "What a good interpreter of the Qur'ân Ibn 'Abbâs is!" Ibn Jarîr has also reported this hadîth through Yahyâ ibn Dâwûd, from Ishâq al-Azraq, from Sufyân, from al-A'mash, from Muslim ibn Sabîh Abî Duhâ, from al-Masrûq with slightly different words: "What a good interpreter Ibn 'Abbâs is of the Qur'ân!" He has also reported the same words through Bundar, from Ja'far ibn 'Awn from al-A'mash. These words are, therefore, the actual words of Ibn Mas'ûd radiallâhu 'anhumâ which he said about Ibn 'Abbâs radiallâhu 'anhumâ. Ibn Mas'ûd radiallâhu 'anhumâ died, most probably, in 33 A.H. Ibn 'Abbâs radiallâhu 'anhumâ lived for thirty six years after him, and added a lot to the treasury of Islâmic knowledge.

Al-A'mash quotes from Abû Wâ'il that Ibn 'Abbâs radiallâhu 'anhumâ was appointed leader of the Hajj by 'Alî radiallâhu 'anhu; he delivered a sermon and read from Sûrah al-Baqarah, or Sûrah an-Nûr according to another report, and explained it in such a way that had the Romans, Turks and the Dalamites heard it, they would have embraced Islâm. This is the reason why most of what Ismâ'îl ibn 'Abd ar-Rahmân Suddî has written in tafsîr consists of the explanations of these two scholars: Ibn Mas'ûd and Ibn 'Abbâs radiallâhu 'anhum.

Source: http://www.sunnahonline.com

From 'An Introduction to the Principles of Tafsîr'
Published by al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution